

President's Special Review Board:  
Unclassified Case Studies

Appendix E of the Report of the President's Special Review Board refers to 14 case studies that were prepared for the Board. Attached are two sets of memoranda and various background materials concerning the 12 unclassified case studies: (1) NSC-68; (2) U-2; (3) Bay of Pigs/Operation Mongoose; (4) Cuban Missile Crisis; (5) Covert Operations in Chile; (6) Cambodia Bombing; (7) Opening to China; (8) Mayaguez Incident; (9) Fall of the Shah; (10) Iran Hostage Negotiation; (11) Desert I Rescue; and (12) Marines in Beirut. The 4-5 page draft memoranda were prepared by scholars who were contacted by members of the Board's staff. The shorter 2-page memoranda on the same case studies were prepared by the Board staff as summary memoranda of the 4-5 page drafts.

These case studies should be viewed in the context in which they were requested by the President's Special Review Board and its staff. In order to examine more fully the working of the National Security Council system over time, the Board determined that it would be useful to examine the operation of the NSC system in a variety of real-world situations. The Board members identified a number of issues and incidents from the Truman Administration through the Reagan Administration that they believed might be instructive, and asked that case studies on those issues and incidents be drafted quickly to refresh their memories of the events, to serve as background material for their discussions with participants in these events, and to assist their deliberations. The Board's staff contacted several scholars about these issues and incidents and requested that they produce draft memoranda of 4-5 pages in length summarizing the relevant facts and highlighting certain areas of interest to the Board. The memoranda were supported by relevant extracts from books, articles, and other unclassified primary and secondary source material. As requested by the Board's staff, these memoranda were prepared by their respective authors as drafts under the severest of time constraints.

COVERT ACTION AGAINST CUBA  
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This paper examines two instances of covert action against Cuba in the Kennedy Administration: The Bay of Pigs and the subsequent Operation Mongoose.

Bay of Pigs

In April 1961, an invasion force of Cuban exiles, Brigade 2506, landed at the Bay of Pigs. The Brigade had been recruited and trained by the CIA. The idea of covert action to overthrow Castro ran back to January 1960, but this invasion plan, which had grown in size and changed in location several times, bore scant resemblance to that first initiative. In the event, the invasion was a disaster. One hundred fourteen of the force died, and 1,189 were captured and later returned for \$53 million in food and drugs, raised privately at the behest of Robert Kennedy. The President eased out Allen Dulles as DCI and Richard Bissell as DDP (now DDO) but acknowledged publicly that the ultimate responsibility was his.

Operation Mongoose

In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs disaster, the Administration sought to regroup. The President authorized a new program, called Mongoose, intended, in the words of a Presidential memo, to "use our available assets...to help Cuba overthrow the Communist regime." Until August 1962, the focus of the operation was on sending exiles into Cuba to collect intelligence, and to conduct sabotage and paramilitary operations, including an attempt to blow up a large Cuban copper mine. The operation had little affect. In late August, the President opted for a stepped up program, but before it was implemented, the Cuban missile crisis intervened. In its wake, Mongoose was ended, though anti-Castro covert action continued under new control arrangements.

At the same time as Mongoose but, apparently, separate from it, the CIA was in contact with Mafia figures in an effort to assassinate Fidel Castro--one of a series of assassination plans that ran back to 1960.

Issues

1. The Kennedy Administration came into office committed to dismantling the "ponderous system of boards, staffs and interdepartmental committees" that its predecessor had used to manage national security policy. Accordingly, at the time of the Bay of Pigs, there was only a very small and informal National Security Council staff. Much of the discussion of the invasion took place directly between the President and Dulles and Bissell (Dulles' deputy).

General Maxwell Taylor, surveying the wreckage of the Bay of Pigs, recommended more systematic oversight of covert operations. His report spawned several Special (oversight) Groups, one of which was responsible for Mongoose. It included the undersecretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Dulles, and Bundy, augmented by Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General, and Taylor, then the President's military assistant. Kennedy was de facto chairman. Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara were not members, but sometimes attended.

2. In neither the Bay of Pigs nor Mongoose is there evidence of deep divisions between Rusk and McNamara, or between them and the President. Rusk's undersecretary, Chester Bowles, strongly opposed the invasion, but Rusk generally displayed an acquiescent silence toward the operation. McNamara supported the invasion but does not seem to have been a central participant in discussions, perhaps regarding it as a CIA operation not in his province.

3-4. In neither case was the NSC Advisor or his staff running the operation, nor even centrally involved. The Bay of Pigs was very much a CIA operation.

5. At the time of both operations, Administrations were not eager to tell Congress much about covert action, and Congress was not interested in hearing all that much.

6. The Kennedy Administration felt its control of the Bay of Pigs invasion planning was deficient. As a result, control of Mongoose--with the strange exception of the assassinations--was extremely tight. It reviewed almost every detail, from targets to schedules to locations. These tight procedures stand in contrast to the assassination plotting, and the latter remains a sad puzzle.

7. The quality of advice was a crucial deficiency in Bay of Pigs decisionmaking, a deficiency that resulted from the lack of more formal NSC review processes and the transition and newness of the Kennedy team. Kennedy asked for a JCS assessment of the plan. What he got was a lukewarm endorsement of the plan, muted because the Chiefs did not believe that they had been asked for a clear view and because the plan was that of a sister agency. Kennedy, however, read the JCS report as much more promising. Nor did senior Administration officials know that the CIA's analysts--as opposed to the operators--did not know of the plan, so had no chance to bring to bear their assessments, which might have cast doubt on key premises. The Special Group designed to remedy these deficiencies. The Group, meeting often, provided both basis of options for debate. Robert Kennedy's role also meant that someone was explicitly protecting the President's stakes in the process.